10 WRITING ABOUT

CIRCLE FILMS/THE KOBAL COLLECTION

Barton Fink (Joel Coen, 1991)

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FILM

Writing a successful paper for a film studies class involves balancing what you know or feel instinctively about a film—impressions formed after years of going to the movies—with observations and insights grounded in class discussion and readings. Most writing assignments offer the opportunity to think deeply about how a film works. Such deep and close analysis forms the foundation for a critical interpretation or reading of a film that is built upon its formal content and/or its cultural, industrial, or historical contexts. The process of exploring ideas, developing an interpretation, and supporting it with specific details is both challenging and rewarding.

This chapter endeavors to guide you through the stages of writing an academic film essay. It can be consulted at any time in the course and covers a sampled range of assignments.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

10-1 Write a clearly organized and well-supported paper about a scene or an entire film that demonstrates your ability to use the skills of film analysis.

10-2 Properly credit your sources.

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10-1 ESSAY WRITING STRATEGIES

For many students, an essay assignment can be a daunting task. And though it may be a cliché, that movie image of a writer sitting at a keyboard staring at a blank page or screen "works" because it is grounded in a familiar experience. The following practical suggestions will guide you through writing an essay for a film class, from understanding the assignment to proofreading the final draft.

10-1a Understand the Assignment

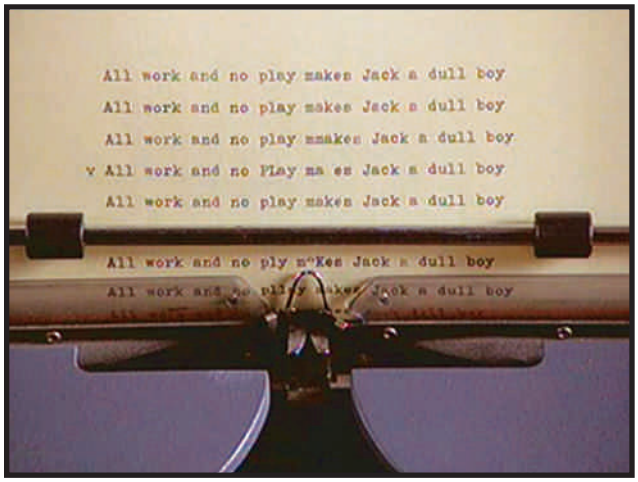
At the risk of stating the obvious, the first step in writing a college essay is to read the assignment carefully and make sure that you understand what is being asked of you, including the purpose of the assignment and type of essay it calls for, the scope of the proposed paper, and the audience for whom you are writing. When thinking about the purpose of the assignment, ask what skills are being tested or challenged by the paper and what aspects of the coursework does the assignment regard? Are you being asked to focus on matters of film form and style—narrative, mise-en-scène, camera work, editing, and sound? Or are you being asked to discuss the film in the context of an established genre or with regard to the commercial, social, or historical context in which it was produced? For such contextual essays, you will need to look "outside the frame" and do additional reading.

Some assignments explicitly ask for your opinion about or personal response to a film. There is no right or wrong when it comes to taste, of course, so the professor is likely looking to see if and how you can support your reactions or develop an argument regarding what you have found attractive or unattractive about the material in question. Such impressionistic assignments are often preliminary; your initial responses can be the starting point for an analysis that is objective rather than subjective—an analysis that puts aside opinions and personal preferences in order to construct an interpretation of the film's meaning or meanings and significance. Indeed, most academic film classes endeavor to develop analytical and critical skills, and most writing assignments ask for what composition professors call "interpretive analysis," the close study of some aspect of a work with a goal of figuring out what it might mean or how this one aspect might contribute to the work as a whole. It is important to be clear from the start whether personal opinions and assessments are appropriate to the assignment.

The scope of the assignment will also drive your plan for the writing process. Are you being asked to focus closely on a single scene or a whole film? In either case, you will need to view the film multiple times. Are you being asked to consider how other academics have thought about the film in question? Given such an assignment, you will need to do some library and/or Internet research. If the scope of the paper is broad—involving several films and/or larger trends—you will need to narrow the topic down significantly. For example, if your topic is the history of the woman's film and your essay is to be five or fewer pages, you will need to hone in on a single aspect common to these films, for example, a character type, a narrative tendency, the use of close-ups, the use of lush orchestral underscoring.

A final aspect of the assignment concerns your audience. Knowing for whom you are writing informs both content and style. If you will be writing a film review for a general audience, then you would likely provide an extensive plot summary, avoid "spoilers," and adopt an informal tone. When writing an academic essay for your professor and possibly other students, you should employ the vocabulary of film analysis, adopt a more serious tone, and use plot summary only when needed to establish a framework for your points.

The following advice is primarily designed for assignments that ask for a close analysis of a scene or full film. Help with research essays that require appropriate documentation is provided in section 10-2.


All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy
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10.1 Getting started can be difficult, as Jack Torrance discovers in *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980).

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10-1b Close Reading and Taking Notes

The process of writing about a film begins with your first encounter with the "primary text"—the film itself. It is helpful to come to a screening with some questions in mind, prepared to take notes. (Screening questions are offered at the end of each chapter; see if they fit your assignment or devise your own.) While you don't want note taking to detract from your enjoyment of the film, quickly record your observations either during or immediately following the screening, while your impressions are still vivid. Don't worry about how the entries might fit together into an argument or thesis. If something strikes you, write it down.

Even though taking notes can be difficult in a public setting and in the dark, many film professors still prefer their students to watch a projected film. The experience of watching a movie with other people on a big screen with a proper sound system can significantly enhance one's appreciation and understanding of a film. Comedy and horror films, for example, depend greatly on their effect on audiences. So while it may not be relevant to comment upon other people's reactions, it is useful on first viewing to get a sense of how such films affect the people around you. Laughing aloud or gasping at a sudden jolt of violence are involuntary responses and are markers of important moments in the film. Watching a film straight through without interruption gives you a better sense of narrative (real and screen) time. Suspense, for example, is about things suspended in time both in the story world and in the theater.

Whether you are watching a film for the first time with other students or alone, the key is to recognize important, unusual, and transitional moments: a major event in the narrative, a (perhaps corresponding) shift in visual style or sound, an exemplary scene that stands out, a sound, a line of dialogue, or an image that is repeated in subtle variations in the film. These observations will help you decide which scenes to focus on for your close analysis.

Subsequent viewings on DVD or online will allow you to take fuller notes and pause the action while you write. You will be able to take notes more quickly by using abbreviations for terms connected to camera work, editing, and sound (see the feature Common Film Abbreviations).

The following example of note-taking focuses on a single key scene in the 1947 film noir *Out of the Past*. The scene in question occurs at the 36-minute mark and roughly at the end of the film's first act, the act that gives the backstory ("the past" of the title) for the events to follow. The scene begins with Jeff and Kathie, hiding out from the gangster Whit Sterling, from whom Jeff has stolen Kathie and from whom Kathie has allegedly stolen $40,000. Jeff (and the audience) believes at this point in the narrative that she is innocent of that crime. Their life on the lam is interrupted when they are discovered by Jeff's former partner, the detective Jack Fisher, who asks for money to keep their location from Whit. A fistfight between the two men ensues—a predictable enough scene. But the fight is punctuated by the film's first big surprise, Jack's murder by Kathie. It is hard to miss that this is a key scene; after all, there is a murder and the scene ends with Kathie abandoning Jeff, leaving behind a dead body and a bankbook affirming her theft from Whit.

Common Film Abbreviations

CU: close-up
XCU: extreme close-up
MCU: medium close-up
MS: medium shot
LS: long shot
XLS: extreme long shot
MLS: medium long shot
HA: high angle
LA: low angle
SL: screen left
SR: screen right
CM: camera movement
TS: tracking shot
HH: handheld
CR: crane
Z: zoom
LT: long take
S/RS: shot/reverse shot
DISS: dissolve
FI: fade-in
FO: fade-out
DS: diegetic sound
NDS: nondiegetic sound
VO: voice-over
OS: off-screen

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10.2 Jeff and Kathie framed in the doorway in Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past* (1947).

10.3 Jeff's former partner Jack calmly approaches the house.

Beginning of scene, Jeff (Robert Mitchum) and Kathie (Jane Greer) at a cabin in the woods at night, looking outside (fig. **10.2**).

- Framing: Off-center two-shot; it's an unsettling image—they have been caught, they are trapped. The doorway is a frame within the frame.
- Camera angle and placement: LA/MS (low-angle medium shot; see the feature Common Film Abbreviations); we see them from the point of view of someone outside, someone they see looking at them.
- Acting: He appears mildly surprised. She looks angry.
- Costumes: He is in his detective's trench coat, and she is dressed in a snug and stylish suit jacket. His city clothes look out of place in the country setting. She is the film's femme fatale, and she looks the part.
- Editing: An eyeline match reveals Jack Fisher walking up the driveway.
- Sound: We hear Jeff's voice-over setting the scene. This explains why Jack's arrival is initially viewed as bad news, and Jack is initially identified as the scene's villain (and not—not yet at least—its victim). The scene is otherwise relatively quiet, with only natural, diegetic sound effects and no music.

Jack Fisher (Steve Brodie) approaches the cabin (fig. **10.3**).

- Camera angle and placement: HA/MLS. We see Jack's arrival from Jeff and Kathie's point of view.
- Acting: The actor appears carefree, nonchalant. The character Jack Fisher thinks he has the upper hand.
- Costume: Jack is dressed in black; he is, from our perspective at this point, the villain in this scene.

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10.4 Kathie shows her ruthless side: "Why don't you break his head?"

Once they are all inside, the focus turns to Kathie (fig. **10.4**).

- Camera placement: MS
- Lighting: A characteristic noir shadow is behind her (a dark doubling suggests that she's up to no good).
- Sets and props: The cabin is decorated with country touches like the ceramic figures in the background at right. These characters look out of place in this setting. The curtain rod and curtains along with the window frame Kathie. The angle of the window frame is leading her out the door.
- Dialogue: "Why don't you break his head?" A shocking line. Maybe Kathie really isn't so innocent after all? Effects remain incidental and diegetic. No music.
- Editing: The line of dialogue surprises both men and cues the next shot.

10.5 Another oddly framed and angled shot.

The two men turn and look at her (fig. **10.5**).

- Framing: Canted and unsettled. Things in the filmed world are suddenly "off."
- Camera angle and placement: LA/MCU. The scale of the human figures is off: Jack fills screen right; Jeff seems smaller, especially with all the negative space above his head. They are looking at Kathie, who is off-screen. Why?
- Lighting: Jeff's face is half-lit, half-dark. Jack's face is dark. This speaks to their characters: half-good/half-bad; all bad.

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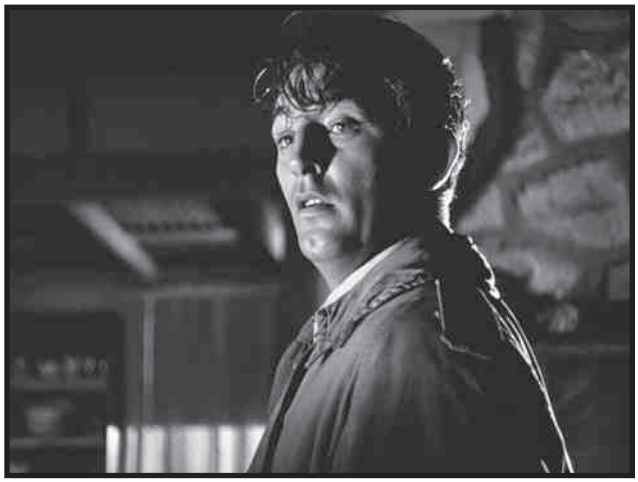

10.6–10.8 Kathie finishes the fight for Jeff. She is clearly not who we thought she was.

The two men slug it out until we hear a gunshot. Then, three quick cuts: from a two-shot of the men fighting (fig. **10.6**), to LA/MCU of Jeff looking surprised (fig. **10.7**), to a complexly framed shot of Kathie holding the gun at her waist (fig. **10.8**).

- Camera angle and position: The LA/MS on Jeff (fig. **10.7**) is ironic; he looms large in the frame but wins the fight only because Kathie shoots Jack.
- Lighting: Jeff's looming shadow coupled with the scale of the shot (fig. **10.8**) is further ironic: he looms large but she's got the gun.
- Acting: Jane Greer as Kathie is cold and emotionless when she explains why she shot Fisher.
- Editing: The eyeline cut promised by the shot of Jeff looking is not realized. We get a two-shot of Kathie and Jeff instead (fig. **10.8**).
- Combined camera work, lighting, acting, and editing: These highlight the notion that things are suddenly not what they seem.
- Sound: A gunshot is heard (fig. **10.6**). Underscoring is introduced: orchestral music rising quickly to a crescendo, then to sustained notes in a lower register and in a minor key. Interesting how there is no music at all in the rest of the scene. And as a result its introduction here makes clear that this is a climactic moment. The gunshot is OS/DS (offscreen and diegetic).

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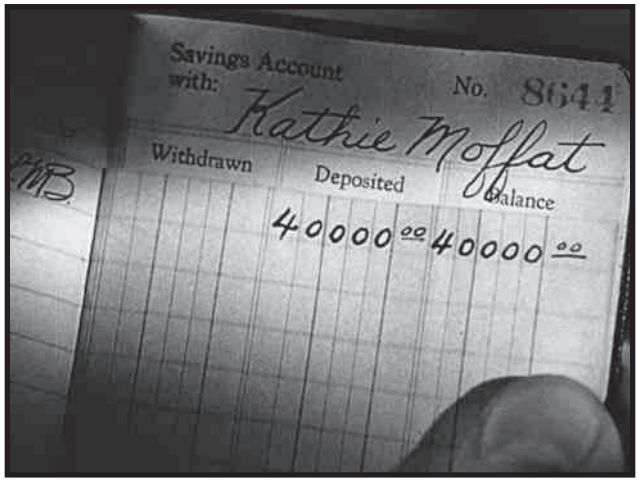
10.9 An ominous shadow hangs over the scene.



10.10 Kathie's bankbook.

We then see Jeff kneeling over Jack's body, checking that he is dead (fig. **10.9**).

- Camera work and blocking: Scale again; Jeff is large in the foreground, Kathie is small in the background. This is odd given what's just happened. He is seen from the waist up, she in full figure. The door is in the frame—why? (We soon discover why: Jeff looks away from Kathie for a moment and she swiftly exits through the door.)
- Lighting: An ominous shadow hangs atop the frame.
- Props: It's hard to miss the gun. In the previous shot it is at her waist and pointing straight ahead. In this shot it just hangs at her side. She isn't threatening Jeff, but she remains armed and in control.
- Dialogue: Kathie explains why she shot Fisher: "You wouldn't have killed him. You would have beat him up and thrown him out." (She finishes the job he can't or won't.)
- Music: Orchestral underscoring—long sustained notes—highlighting the suspense.

Jeff pauses over the body, and the camera holds on him as he lights yet another cigarette (a motif throughout the film). In the meantime we hear sounds from off-screen culminating with a car ignition firing and tires moving along a gravel road. We see the open door. Subsequent shots are of Kathie driving away and Jeff looking at Kathie's bankbook (fig. **10.10**). This shot proves that Kathie really did steal from Whit.

- Camera position and angle: CU on bankbook page suggests Jeff's point of view.
- Lighting: Maintains noir shadows, but the name and deposit amount in the bankbook are lit and readable.
- Music: Orchestral underscoring mark Jeff's (and our) realization that Kathie is a criminal, not a victim.

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Your notes will provide the specific details that you'll need to support your interpretation of the film. They can also help you see significant patterns in the scene that can be the starting point for an interpretive claim or thesis. In this scene, for example, the doorframe is noted in connection with entrapment and escape, which may lead you to look for how doors and gates are used elsewhere in the film and then discuss what the significance of this aspect of mise-en-scène might be. The notes above include observations about gender role reversal that could lead to an examination of gender and power as it plays out in the narrative, including an analysis of Kathie as a femme fatale or of Jeff as a man's man nonetheless losing control over the narrative (this despite the extensive use of voice-over that might otherwise signify his mastery, his control over what he sees and does). You might consider the larger significance of such unusual elements as the canted framing, the odd shadows, and the way that these characters look out of place in the country setting. Engaging the scene in a dialogue—a Q and A session of sorts in which you ponder how aspects of narrative form and style function in the film—can also help you to generate ideas that will lead to an interpretive claim, a basis upon which you can build the argument proposed by your paper.

10-1c Organizing and Writing

While no single formula applies to every writer, it is generally a good idea to organize your notes before you begin writing. For many writers, making an outline helps. An outline can be a simple list of ideas or a selection of important shots and scenes to highlight. Adding details or examples (from your notes) under these basic headings helps you move from generalities to specifics.

For the sample scene analysis essay reprinted at the end of this chapter (see Focus on Writing a Scene Analysis Paper: *Now, Voyager* on page 290), the writer's notes followed the chronology of the scene, but the outline then reordered the observations into an alternative scheme, putting into separate categories aspects of narrative, theatrical blocking, lighting, costume, makeup and hair, sets and setting, camera work, editing, and sound. For the sample film analysis essay also reprinted at the end of the chapter (see Focus on Writing a Film Analysis Paper: *The Big Sleep* on page 292), the working outline was initially organized into five key moments in the film that clearly illustrated the writer's interpretive idea. The writer then filled in details taken from the viewing notes that supported the interpretation. The essay follows the basic chronology of the selected scenes and the headings in the writer's outline.

When you are ready to start writing, it is time to develop your interpretive idea into a thesis and then to express that idea in a concise and precise form: a thesis statement. The thesis statement is crucial in focusing your argument, making clear to your reader what you plan to do, what you plan to examine, and (as many professors like to put it) "what's at stake" in your paper. The thesis statement goes beyond mere description (a neutral account of what you observe in the film) to offer a complex intellectual argument.

A compelling thesis moves past what would be obvious to anyone seeing the film. Many professors encourage students to begin with "a working thesis," a rough version of the argument, which might change as you think through your ideas in writing. By the time you have a final draft of the paper, the thesis should be precise and assertive.

Each paragraph works to develop the thesis. In the sample scene analysis paper, each paragraph focuses on a single element and how it communicates an idea about the character's transformation. In the sample film analysis paper, the paragraphs build an argument about class conflict by moving chronologically through the film, devoting a paragraph or more to explicating each of the key scenes. Every paragraph should have a unifying idea, usually announced in a topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, a sentence that indicates how the paragraph will develop the thesis. All of the details in the paragraph should focus on the "promise" made in the topic sentence.

There is no set length for paragraphs. But if a paragraph is just a couple of sentences, it may mean that you are not spending enough time elaborating your argument, that you do not have a sufficient number of examples or are not spending enough time describing these examples and making clear how they support your argument. If a paragraph fills an entire page, there is probably more than one topic in play, and breaking it into two paragraphs will be a good idea.

Writing the final, or concluding, paragraph can be challenging. One approach is to restate the opening thesis in a slightly altered fashion and then to segue into some version of "As I have shown, . . ." or "This paper has shown . . . ." This satisfies a narrative continuity: the introductory paragraph has established what will be discussed, the body of the paper carries out that promise, and the concluding paragraph states in general terms how the rest of the paper has delivered on the promise made in its introduction. But this style can be quite dull;

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if the reader has read the paper closely, why do they need to be reminded about what they have already read? Also, this formal strategy invites oversimplification and generalization, the very things you have endeavored to avoid in the body of your paper. You have after all written several paragraphs to make your argument; how then can you summarize all this work without cheapening it?

A better strategy for the concluding paragraph is to use summary and recapitulation, both necessary to an extent in a conclusion, to make or highlight a final point. The concluding paragraph in the scene analysis paper offers a useful model (see Focus on Writing a Scene Analysis Paper: *Now, Voyager* on page 290). It accomplishes two goals: it focuses on sound (especially underscoring) and it takes us to the final shot of the film (and back to the title of the essay, which is taken from the film's exit line). In doing so, this concluding paragraph uses the brief discussion of sound and music to reemphasize the larger argument about Charlotte's transformation, as promised in the introductory paragraph. The concluding paragraph in the film analysis paper focuses on how the film's ending glosses over the central conflict developed in the essay in order to supply the film's "Hollywood ending." In doing so, it follows the chronological account of the film presented in the body of the paper but also offers a mild surprise or twist on the thesis (see Focus on Writing a Film Analysis Paper: *The Big Sleep* on page 292).

10-1d Revising and Proofreading

Writing is a process: notes, outline, first draft. Completing a first draft is an accomplishment. But expecting this first stab at your paper to be ready to hand in is unrealistic. Indeed, a final and crucial stage remains: revision, which includes rereading, rethinking, rewriting, and proofreading. Successful writers—critics, historians, novelists, poets—routinely go through multiple drafts before they submit their work.

The following checklist should help you revise your paper successfully.

1. If possible, take a day off between completing your first draft and starting the second draft. You want to bring "fresh eyes" to the work.
2. As you reread the essay, ask, does the paper have a clear (and clearly stated) thesis? Will the reader understand what you set out to prove?
3. Does the opening paragraph establish which film(s) or scenes you will be discussing and provide sufficient context for your reader?
4. Does each paragraph have a clear topic or function that connects to and helps you explore your thesis? Do the examples follow and support a stated topic, idea, or goal? Are the examples relevant and persuasive?
5. Do the paragraphs follow logically in the exposition of your argument?
6. Does the body of the paper fulfill the promise made in the opening paragraph?
7. Does the paper have a clear, concise, and interesting concluding paragraph?
8. Reread the paper again, aloud. As you read through the essay, *listen* to the prose. Is the diction (the word choice) natural and persuasive, controlled and clear? Listen for awkward phrases and sentences that don't seem to follow logically. If you have to slow down or stumble as you read aloud, that's a clue that something might need to be rewritten.
9. If possible take another day off. Fresh eyes, again.
10. Proofread. Your word-processing program will do some of the work for you, but it is not infallible, and the program does not know what you're trying to say in your paper. Here again, reading aloud helps, if only because it slows down your rereading, which will help call attention to instances of clunky grammar and awkward phrasing. Proofreading shows the reader you cared enough about what you've written to make sure it looks and sounds right.
11. Finally, if you've done outside research, check to make sure the quotations and the citations are accurate.

10-2 RESEARCH AND CITATION

Academic writing is often viewed as a conversation among scholars in which ideas are shared and debated. Reading other critics' interpretations of a film not only gives you new insights but may also help you develop your own observations. You must, however, credit their work. This section offers tips for finding and documenting sources.

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10-2a Conducting Research

Research is a broad term and can include everything from gathering information on the cast and crew to learning more about the movie business, historical and social contexts, and seeing what other scholars have said about the film and filmmakers you are discussing. It is important to remember that research is not simply the accumulation of information to decorate or fill out a paper. The key to successful research is discerning what information supports your argument or thesis. Thinking about and answering a few key questions can help you begin a research project:

- What am I looking for? (This need not involve a certain conclusion. You may not know in advance what you will find out. But a basic research question helps narrow things down. Remember: a research paper begins with an implied promise, a critical or analytical question.)
- What does my audience expect to learn or gain from this project? (Take a long, hard look at the assignment.)
- In what sort of texts (monographs or books, academic journals, trade journals, popular magazines, newspapers, or websites) will I likely find useful information?

With regard to the third question above, it is also smart to use a balance of different sources. You don't want your paper to depend on just one key source. If it does, you risk simply recasting someone else's argument as your own. And you don't want your paper to depend on just one type of source. For this latter concern, it is important to distinguish between the two types of research material: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources—the film, a script, a production budget, an autobiography, relevant legal documents, and artifacts—provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence. You will always use at least one primary source, of course—the film or films you are studying. If, for example, you were writing about *The Godfather* as an example of a Hollywood studio-produced auteur film that reversed the box-office decline after the second world war (see 9-1e), primary sources such as the original production budget, the contentious memos exchanged between producer Robert Evans and director Francis Coppola, and data on the film's box-office performance will be valuable. If your focus is instead on the film as an adaptation, you would need Mario Puzo's novel as a key primary source.

Secondary sources offer description and interpretation of primary sources; critical essays and biographies are examples. Secondary sources are valuable for most critical analysis papers as they offer a broader context for arguments culled from primary sources.

The best place to start a research project is your college library, where a research librarian can help direct your search. A quick catalogue search and even a walk through the stacks in the relevant subject area can produce excellent results. Also quite useful are electronic databases like Lexis/Nexis and Project Muse and published periodical guides like the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and the *MLA Bibliography*. Encyclopedias are useful for fact checking and basic background information but they seldom include analysis that you can productively use.

The Internet offers access to a wealth of film journals, blogs, databases, and wiki-sites. Focus your attention on sites that are vetted—where publication is selective and based on rigorous editorial criteria. The work found on these sites will be properly edited, fact-checked, and proofread. For example, *Film Comment* (http://filmlinc.com/film-comment), a print journal published by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, offers much of its material free online, and the venerable film, media, and society journal *JumpCut* (http://www.ejumpcut.org/home.html) is available in its entirety and free online. Other reliable Internet sources include the official sites of the American Film Institute (www.afi.com) and the Library of Congress Motion Picture and Television Reading Room (http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/). For business context and production details, the industry trade journal *Variety* (http://www.variety.com/Home/) is very helpful.

Some rules of the road: be wary of glitzy gossip-oriented sites and opinion-based blogs. Be judicious

10.11 Depending on your focus, a research essay on *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) could draw from primary sources such as the script, the novel, and interviews, or secondary sources such as film reviews, essays, and books about the film, director, era, and genre.

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when using Wikipedia and the Internet Movie Database (IMDb); laudable as these projects are, many of the entries are "under construction" or "under review" and accuracy is a goal not yet met. The Internet has put a wealth of information at our fingertips. But a lot of what we find on the web is subjective. And a lot of it is inaccurate. Determining the reliability of a site is essential and difficult. Many professors prefer library research to Internet surfing. Others require students to use a combination of print and electronic sources.

From first-hand experience I can attest that research can be a lot of fun, and it can lead in some unexpected directions. In my own research, for example, I have begun looking into one thing and ended up learning a lot about another. Doing research is much like piecing together a puzzle, one that changes and moves towards conclusion subtly but distinctly with each new piece of information.

For example, after a screening of *The Blair Witch Project* in my New American Cinema class a student asked, "Well if *The Blair Witch Project* was so successful, why did Artisan Entertainment (its distributor) go out of business so soon after the film's release?" I didn't know the answer, so I decided to do a little research. My research at the library and on the web took me in a number of fascinating directions, some merely interesting but not that relevant to the project (e.g., the film's star, Heather Donahue, quit acting after failing to find a decent follow-up role and took up growing marijuana for a living), and others that helped explain how and why the company failed (its earlier troubled history as Live Entertainment, the company owned by Jose Menendez, who was killed along with his wife by his two sons in one of the most famous murders in recent Hollywood history), its failed ventures into home video (just as that industry fell apart), and its purchase and liquidation by Bain Capital, a venture capital company founded and run by Mitt Romney. What I gleaned from my research into why Artisan went out of business was the story of a company embroiled in scandal (the Menendez murders), a company that invested foolishly (in videotapes and later retail video stores just as the Internet would make such businesses obsolete), a company that fell victim to a well-known venture capitalist and politician who profited from its takeover and liquidation.

10-2b Crediting Sources

Whenever you use research material in the writing of your essay, whether it is a direct quotation or a paraphrase (in which you've put another writer's ideas in your own words), you need to attribute credit where it is due: you need to properly cite the source of the quotation or idea. Failure to do so is plagiarism, a breach of academic honesty and integrity that is not tolerated on any campus anywhere.

The principal exception to this rule is when information that you've encountered in your research is a commonly held opinion or a fact that can be readily obtained: "the 1960s were a politically turbulent decade," for example, or "Brad Pitt is a movie star." You would need to document someone else's original research into a cause of 1960s unrest or their opinion on the reasons for Pitt's stardom. A second exception is specific to film essays: quotations from movie dialogue, even when checked for accuracy in a published screenplay, need not be cited.

In addition to using citations to credit your sources as described in the next section, remember to use quotation marks when you are using a source's exact language. When you paraphrase, avoid phrasing that closely resembles the original.

Among the most common formats for documenting sources in college papers are the MLA (Modern Language Association) style, in which abbreviated citations are made in parentheses in the body of the essay; the APA (American Psychological Association) style, which also uses parentheses; and the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which uses numbered in-text citations. All have specific formats for listing works cited at the end of the paper. No documentation style is inherently superior (so, always use the documentation format assigned by your professor), and all serve the same basic purpose; they give due credit to the author of the quoted passage or borrowed idea or information in a consistent and clearly organized format. An additional function of following a proper citation format is to provide readers with the information necessary to easily find and consult your sources themselves.

10-2c MLA Documentation Style

MLA Style: In-Text Citations

Parenthetical (in-text) citations in your essay give readers some basic information about your sources and also allow them to locate your source in a list entitled *Works Cited* at the end of your paper. Basic information includes the author and page reference. If the author is named in the body of the sentence, then the parenthetical citation does not repeat that name. The parenthetical citation is placed after a quoted or paraphrased idea, within the sentence.

In the novel *Now, Voyager,* the omniscient narration grants us access to Charlotte's thoughts: "But she hadn't smoked the cigarette to assert her own personality. On the contrary she smoked it to conceal her own personality" (Prouty 3).

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As the film historian Robin Wood asserts, *Meet John Doe* "at once transcends its director and would be inconceivable without him" (66).

Eric Smoodin's research into the fan mail generated by *Meet John Doe* reveals a startling lack of consensus among American moviegoers in 1941 to the policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal (158).

If you include *two or more works by the same author* in your paper, then the author's name alone would not be enough for your reader to locate the full source in your works-cited list. Include the title of the work in your sentence, either in parentheses or within the body of the sentence.

When citing a film for the first time, include the director as well as the title. MLA style does not require that you include the year of the film's release; however, it is common to do so in a film paper.

Irving Rapper's 1943 film *Now, Voyager* celebrates the notion of female self-sacrifice for a higher cause.

Now, Voyager (Irving Rapper, 1943) celebrates the notion of female self-sacrifice for a higher cause.

For a quotation of four or more lines, use block quotation style—quotation marks are not used; the passage starts a new line and is indented by one inch. Note that block quotations are the exception to the rule about putting the parenthetical citation within the sentence. The page number in this example is placed outside the end punctuation, the question mark.

In a 1992 essay titled "Slacking Toward Bethlehem," journalist Andrew Kopkind summarized the attitude of Gen-X slackers and Kevin Smith's film characters:

> In a few years, a steady job at a mall outlet or a food chain may be all that's left for college graduates. Life is more and more like a lottery—is a lottery—with nothing but the luck of the draw determining whether you get a recording contract, get your screenplay produced, or get a job with your MBA. Slacking is thus a rational response to casino capitalism, the randomization of success . . . if it is impossible to find a good job, why not slack and enjoy life? (187)

For an in-text citation of an online source, follow the same guidelines as above. If paragraph or screen numbers are provided instead of page numbers, work those into your citation: (author, screen no.) or (author, par. no.). If those are not available, embed a cue into your sentence that will lead the reader to the appropriate citation in your works-cited list. Do not clutter in-text citations with URLs.

MLA Style: The Works-Cited List

The works-cited list provides fuller publication data about your sources so that it would be possible for a reader to locate them in a library or online. The list starts a new page with "Works Cited" as the centered heading, and the list is arranged alphabetically. It is double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and the page number in the upper right corner (this formatting applies to the entire paper). Entries that are longer than one line should be indented one-half inch on the subsequent lines. The simplest approach is to type the entries flush left, with a new line for each entry, and then apply a one-half-inch hanging indent to the entire list after you are done.

The following guidelines are for the types of sources most commonly found in documented papers written for introductory-level film courses. For more information or guidelines on other types of sources, consult the *MLA Handbook, Seventh Edition* (2009).

A film. Include the name of the film, the director, distribution data, and medium (film, DVD, web). Note how the title of a foreign film is handled.

Breathless [À bout de souffle]. 1960. Wellspring Media, 2004. DVD.

Now, Voyager. Dir. Irving Rapper. Warner Bros., 1942. Film.

A book. Include author or editor's name(s), the book's title, publication data, and medium consulted.

Barnard, Timothy, and Peter Rist, eds. *South American Cinema: A Critical Filmography, 1915–1994.* New York: Garland, 1996. Print.

Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.* New York: St. Martins, 1991. Print.

Smoodin, Eric. *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930–1960.* Durham: Duke UP, 2004. Print.

Note that additional entries for the same author substitute three hyphens for his or her name.

—-. *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993. Print.

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A work in an anthology. Include the author and title of the piece you are citing within the anthology as well as information about the anthology. Include the page numbers of the entire piece in the works-cited list and the specific page you are citing in your in-text citation.

Wood, Robin. "Ideology, Genre, Auteur." *Film Genre Reader II.* Ed. Barry Keith Grant. Austin: UT Press, 1995. 60-74. Print.

An article or essay in a journal, magazine, or newspaper. Include the author, title of the piece, and general publication information (journal title, volume, issue, and year), including inclusive page numbers.

Klinger, Barbara. "Contraband Cinema: Piracy, *Titanic,* and Central Asia." *Cinema Journal* 49.2 (2010): 106-24. Print.

Kopkind, Andrew. "Slacking Toward Bethlehem." *Grand Street* 44 (1992): 176-8. Print.

Möller, Olaf. "One Man's Hong Kong: Patrick Lung Kong, Keeper of the Cantonese Cinema Flame." *Film Comment* 46.4 (2010): 14-5. Print.

A web publication. The latest MLA guidelines state that it is not essential to include a URL in your works-cited list. The guidelines also recognize that not all desired information is available for web sources and that the main idea is to be as thorough and consistent as possible when citing them. In addition to supplying the author, title, and date of publication as you would for a print source, include the title and publisher or sponsor of the web site, and date of access.

Greven, David. "American Medusa: Bette Davis, Beyond the Forest, Femininity and Camp." *Jump Cut* 53 (2011): 1. Web. 6 March 2012.

Prouty, Olive Higgins. *Now, Voyager.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941. *Google Book Search.* Web. 6 March 2012.

10-2d APA Documentation Style

Like the MLA style, the APA citation format has two parts: in-text citations and a works-cited list at the end of the paper (titled *References* and starting a new page). The key elements of in-text citations in APA style are author, year of publication, and page number if there is a direct quotation. Any of these elements that are not embedded in the sentence should appear in parentheses within the sentence:

As the film historian Robin Wood asserts, *Meet John Doe* "at once transcends its director and would be inconceivable without him" (1995, p. 66).

The fan mail generated by *Meet John Doe* reveals a startling lack of consensus among American moviegoers in 1941 to the policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal (Smoodin, 2004).

The reference list is organized alphabetically, and hanging indents are used after the first line of each entry. The following are sample entries for a film, a book, and a journal article. For more detailed information, consult the *APA Style Manual, Sixth Edition*, or visit www.apastyle.org.

Rapper, I. (1942). *Now, voyager* [DVD]. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video.

Smoodin, E. (2004). *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience celebrity and American film studies, 1930–1960.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Klinger, B. (2010). "Contraband cinema: Piracy, *Titanic,* and Central Asia." *Cinema Journal,* 49(2), 106–124.

10-2e *Chicago Manual* Documentation Style

The Chicago Manual of Style guideline has two required parts: numbered in-text citations and numbered footnotes or endnotes. Often a bibliography of works consulted is also required. (Note also that *Chicago* has an alternative system as well that is similar to MLA and APA styles.) Within the text, a superscript number is placed by the quotation or borrowed material:

The fan mail generated by *Meet John Doe* reveals a startling lack of consensus among American moviegoers in 1941 to the policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal.[1]

As the film historian Robin Wood asserts, *Meet John Doe* "at once transcends its director and would be inconceivable without him."[2]

Either at the foot of the page or in a new page at the end of the paper that is headed *Notes*, give the source information that corresponds to the numbered citation. For details, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style, Sixteenth Edition*, or visit the Chicago Manual of Style's online citation quick guide at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.

1. Eric Smoodin, *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience Celebrity and American Film Studies, 1930–1960* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 158.
2. Robin Wood, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur." In *Film Genre Reader II,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 66.

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FOCUS on Writing a Scene Analysis Paper: *Now, Voyager*

The scene analysis assignment requires a close and focused reading of a key moment in a film. The goal may be a purely descriptive paper, one that ably observes and identifies the elements of narrative, mise-en-scène, camera work, editing, and/or sound in the chosen scene. Often, however, the paper asks for "analysis," an examination of how the elements contribute to an aspect of the film's meaning. The analysis might proceed by analyzing each shot in sequence (see the shot-by-shot analysis of a scene from Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* in chapter 1), or it might be organized topically, with each paragraph devoted to an element of film form or style.

"Don't Let's Ask for the Moon, We Have the Stars": A Scene Analysis

The 1942 Hollywood melodrama *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper) ends as Charlotte (Bette Davis) affirms her love for Jerry (Paul Henreid), a married man she met on a cruise, and his daughter Tina, whom she has taken into her care. The scene is significant not only because it brings the narrative to a close but also because this closure is achieved on her terms, not his. All of the cinematic elements in this scene signal the completion of Charlotte's transformation from a miserable spinster, entirely dependent on a repressive mother, to an independent woman in control of her own destiny.

The introduction establishes the name of the film, year of release, and director. The scene to be discussed is put in context of the larger narrative and its significance is explained. The final sentence in the introduction establishes the thesis, the claim to be developed in the remainder of the paper.

Now, Voyager's final scene begins as a confrontation between Charlotte and Jerry over Tina. Jerry wants to take Tina from Charlotte, arguing that raising her is too much of a sacrifice for Charlotte to make; Charlotte finds his reasoning "conventional, pretentious, and pious" and expresses her dream of sharing a bond with him through their love of this child. Closure begins as Jerry finally accepts Charlotte's proposal, which comes with the requirement (stipulated by Tina's psychiatrist) that they cannot be lovers. Acquiescing, Jerry says, "Shall we have a cigarette on it?" He then lights two cigarettes in his signature gesture, which had previously suggested sexual desire and now signals their agreement to remain chaste. The sequence and the film end as Charlotte delivers a powerful exit line, one that affirms a new sense of her life's

This plot summary of the scene provides the reader with background for the analysis to follow, but it also elaborates on the idea of closure being achieved on Charlotte's terms.

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potential as a "mother" in an unconventional family. "Will you be happy, Charlotte?" Jerry asks. And she responds, poetically, "Oh Jerry, don't let's ask for the moon, we have the stars."

Charlotte's transformation into a woman in control of her own destiny is enacted in the theatrical blocking of the scene. She is the more physically active of the two characters; the camera finds Jerry standing still in most of the shots, but it follows Charlotte as she moves into the room to see Jerry, then away from him during their argument, and then back toward him at the end. At one point he draws her close to him as if to kiss, but she finds the strength to resist and persuades him to let her go. In the end, they stand side by side, not as a romantic couple but as individuals (and equals) who share a deep affection for Tina.

The topic sentence signals the connection to the main idea announced in the introduction and makes it clear that the paragraph will be about blocking. The details about blocking in the sentences that follow have a clear connection to the topic sentence.

The three-point lighting on Charlotte also figures into her transformation, giving her that "kind of beauty" she tells Tina about in a previous scene: "a light that shines from inside you because you're a nice person." Her wardrobe, makeup, and hair complete the physical transformation that accompanies her psychological development. At the beginning of the film, she wears a frumpy, old-fashioned dress with ugly shoes. Her drab makeup makes her look pasty and pale and accentuates her thick brows. Her hair is held tight in an unattractive bun. In this last scene, Charlotte's clothes are elegant and look expensive, her hair is stylishly arranged, and her makeup accentuates her expressive eyes (see fig. 1), important here because they tear up to signal her heartbreak.

The topic sentence does not always have to be the first sentence in the paragraph; here, the first two sentences establish the connection to the paper's main idea.

If you include illustrations in your paper, assign each one a figure number and include a reference to the figure in the body of your paper. *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* describes how to create frame grabs in its "About Us" section under "Creating a Visual Essay."

The setting also communicates that Charlotte is living her life on her own terms. She now owns the house that had once imprisoned her, and it too has been transformed. The room where she meets privately with Jerry has a fire in the fireplace, which has an obvious romantic implication, but it also says something

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about Charlotte's rejection of the ways of her tyrannical mother, who forbade fires as a wasteful luxury. Charlotte promises to be a far warmer mother to Tina than her mother was to her. There are flowers in every room as well. Not only do the flowers add to the beauty of the environment that Charlotte has created but they also refer to the flower motif that has run throughout the film paralleling Charlotte's "blossoming." Also prominently placed in the setting is a baby-grand piano, which is in striking contrast to the little ivory boxes that had once been Charlotte's only artistic outlet. In the final scene, Charlotte invites Jerry to visit her in this house, but it is clear that she will remain firmly in charge of it.

All of the details of mise-en-scène are presented in terms of how they connect to the idea of Charlotte's transformation.

Fig. 1. Bette Davis is lit and styled to communicate her inner beauty in the final scene of *Now, Voyager*. A medium-close shot allows us to see the tears in her eyes.

The camera work and classical Hollywood continuity editing scheme serves primarily to let us watch the characters interact and be absorbed by their emotions, especially Charlotte's. The one medium-close shot in the final moments allows us to read her face and acknowledge the tears in her eyes (see fig. 1). The final cut of the film takes us out of the room and into the sky, a reference to the metaphor in Charlotte's final line about their future together (see fig. 2). This final camera gesture takes us out of the world of the film and into a future that may not be all that

Camera work and continuity editing are combined in one paragraph here, but a more detailed analysis of each element would require separate paragraphs.

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Charlotte could have ever wanted but that is nonetheless filled with promise and love (for Tina).

Max Steiner's lush romantic music enhances the scene's emotional intensity and underscores Charlotte's sacrifice. When the scene begins, the dialogue is most prominent in the sound mix, as it provides insight into Charlotte's plan—her decision to abandon her romantic relationship with Jerry for the good of "their" child—that is necessary for narrative closure. While there is some incidental music in the background, it is hardly noticeable. But when the characters move close and an embrace seems imminent, the underscored music swells. "It Can't Be Wrong," aka "Charlotte's Theme," is a melody used earlier in the film to signal the intensity of their romance but here marks the end of their romantic relationship. Charlotte's noble sacrifice for the good of Tina completes her transformation into a strong, independent woman and allows the film to close on an upbeat note, despite the teary ending.

Because this is a short paper, the conclusion is a simple statement at the end of the last paragraph. It refers back to the original idea without repeating it, adding new ideas that have been introduced along the way. In a fuller essay (see the next sample paper), the conclusion would be a separate paragraph.

Fig. 2. The closing shot in *Now, Voyager* is an eyeline match that refers to Charlotte's final line in the film.

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FOCUS on Writing a Film Analysis Paper: *The Big Sleep*

The film analysis assignment takes the scene analysis essay to another level. Rather than focus on just one key moment in the film, the object here is make an interpretive claim that encompasses the whole film and to support that claim with a close reading of several scenes. The following sample includes a few outside sources that offer additional perspectives on the essay's central thesis and that provide an example of MLA documentation style. Note that this is not a model for a research paper, which requires building upon published work from a number of outside sources to formulate and elaborate an argument.

Dramatizing Class in *The Big Sleep* (1946)

Howard Hawks's 1946 film adaptation of Raymond Chandler's 1939 detective novel *The Big Sleep* focuses on dramatic conflicts between upper-class and working-class characters. These conflicts provide the foundation for what is basically a crime drama, and we are asked to view crime as a consequence or manifestation of class-distinct attitudes and values. Also in play are notions of masculinity and social and romantic interaction that are complicated by class differences, especially in the film's surprising denouement.

The introduction establishes the name of the film, year of release, and director and the pertinent detail that it is an adaptation of a novel. The thesis is stated.

The fundamental class differences at stake in the story are introduced the moment Marlowe arrives at the Sternwood mansion in the film's opening sequence. It is an imposing place with large, public rooms at the front and a glassed-in greenhouse at the back. Marlowe is met at the door by Norris, a butler, whose neat formal attire and prim manner appear in clear contrast to Marlowe's rumpled suit and wisecracking informality. The butler walks briskly ahead while the detective pauses to take in the sights, including an ornate family crest (a prop surely identifying the Sternwoods as "old money") placed prominently in the entryway (see fig. 1). It is clear from this moment that Marlowe has entered another world in which appearances are at once important and deceptive, another world that will fascinate him for the duration of the film.

The paper tracks the film chronologically. We begin with the first scene and end with the last scene.

The second paragraph introduces the chronological organization. It also begins with a sentence that sets the scene and then proceeds, through a discussion of relevant aspects of style and form, to present an interpretation of that scene relevant to the thesis stated in the opening paragraph.

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Fig. 1. A tracking shot takes Marlowe into the Sternwood mansion. Here he pauses to gawk at the Sternwood family crest, a symbol of the family's upper-class, old-money status.

As Marlowe is left to wait in the mansion's anteroom and Norris exits the scene to inform the General of Marlowe's arrival, Carmen Sternwood descends the stairway. Costumed in what for the time was an outrageously short skirt, sheer nylons, and a tight-fitting blouse, Carmen proceeds to flirt with Marlowe. Just as Norris returns, and no doubt performing for his benefit, Carmen falls into Marlowe's arms. Later Marlowe will tell Carmen's father that "she tried to sit in my lap while I was standing up"—a typical wisecrack for the world-weary, working-class detective. Carmen is attractive and available, but Marlowe knows better than to encourage her. He sees through her performance and recognizes in her behavior symptoms of a careless lifestyle.

Aspects of mise-en-scène are used to develop the significance of this first scene.

Marlowe is also astute enough to recognize that Carmen is "trouble" and that she is also "troubled," that the act she puts on reveals someone quite out of control. Thus, taking Carmen up on her offer would involve taking advantage, and his working-class masculinity—a subject of interest throughout the film—does not allow that. Marlowe will soon discover that men less tied to working-class notions of honor, loyalty, and fair play have behaved carelessly with regard to Carmen; indeed, their exploitation of Carmen's mental illness (as her promiscuous behavior is regarded in the film) is the reason that Marlowe has been called to the mansion in the first place.

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The dialogue between Carmen and Marlowe that precedes her fall into his arms does well to establish Marlowe's essential character. She asks flirtatiously if he is a prizefighter, no doubt a comment on his rugged and ragged appearance. The private detective, like the boxer, was a staple of forties-era crime films and this character type consistently embodied a working-class masculinity: hard work, hard knocks, and so on. When she asks his name, he responds, jokingly, with "Doghouse Reilly," a remark that regards the difference in their social class. His play on the idiom "in the doghouse" implies that he exists outside so-called polite and proper society. Filmgoers in 1946 immediately recognized this character type in large part because Marlowe is played by Humphrey Bogart. As the film historian James Naremore notes in his book *More than Night,* Bogart's star persona was fully consistent with the character he plays in *The Big Sleep:* "tough, introspective . . . fond of whiskey and cigarettes" (27). Throughout the film we are asked to read Marlowe and Bogart as consistent, intersecting, working-class, masculine types. Such a reading also involves Bogart's celebrity as a romantic lead—he had appeared in *Casablanca* half a decade earlier—which is especially important to the film's unlikely denouement, as we will see.

After dispensing with Carmen, Marlowe meets the General in the mansion's hothouse. The setting is revealing; it depicts in physical terms the consequences for the General of a life of sin and dissolution, behaviors the General himself describes as consequences of wealth and privilege (see fig. 2). Much of his conversation with Marlowe is steeped in regret; he acknowledges that a careless life has left him as frail as "a baby spider." The setting speaks also to Carmen's character; while Carmen's flirtatiousness has its sinister side (her father describes her as "still a little child who likes to pull wings off of flies"), she is also regarded by her father as a

The paragraph begins with a topic sentence. The body of the paragraph follows up on the promise made in this first sentence, to examine how their dialogue regards class difference.

This relevant use of an outside source (and the inclusion of a verbatim quotation from that source) includes an appropriate setup in the paper ("As the film historian . . .") and citation (here using the MLA style).

This last sentence, along with the final sentence of the first paragraph foreground and foreshadow the essay's conclusion.

This paragraph examines how set design and, more generally, setting can be used to establish key distinctions in the story told by the film.

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"hothouse flower." Like one of the General's prize orchids, several of which are conspicuously placed in the hot house set, she has been pampered, overprotected, and as a consequence she is ill-suited to the cold hard life outside the mansion's walls. Indeed, Marlowe has been called to the Sternwood mansion to deal with just the latest situation that Carmen has stumbled into; a blackmailer named Geiger has taken nude photographs of Carmen after she passed out on drugs and alcohol in his company.

The essay briefly breaks with chronology to make an important comparative point.

Fig. 2. Marlowe and General Sternwood in the hothouse discuss the case.

After Marlowe exits the hothouse, Norris offers to pay him. But Marlowe, who clings to a strict work ethic, refuses; he wants to get paid only after he has done the job. His fee structure is certainly working class: "$25 a day plus expenses." This we see in comparison to the General's older daughter Vivian, who later in the film lets $14,000 ride on a single spin of the roulette wheel. Marlowe's work ethic puts a value on money; it is something he earns. Vivian gambles because money has little value to her; if she loses, as she often does, she knows her father will come to the rescue.

Before he leaves the Sternwood mansion, Marlowe is summoned to Vivian's room. The fundamental class difference between Marlowe and Vivian is made clear in this, their first, tense meeting. She is neatly and stylishly dressed; he is still sweat-soaked from his meeting in the hothouse. They step on each other's lines—an acting technique

The opening sentence sets the scene and the rest of the paragraph offers specific observations and poses an interpretive analysis of the scene based on those observations that are relevant to the thesis.

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that dramatizes disagreement and incompatibility. She remarks at his lack of deference, that he does not immediately show her the respect she has become accustomed to because of her wealth and privilege. For the working-class detective, respect is something one does not simply get; it is something one earns. At one point in their conversation, Vivian quips, "I don't like your manners." He confesses that he doesn't like them much himself. Marlowe regards manners with suspicion; as a working-class hero, he is decidedly unpretentious. This is not to say that Marlowe is impolite. Indeed, when he meets the general in the overheated greenhouse, despite his discomfort, he waits for the old man to suggest that he take off his coat. Such common courtesy is consistent with his simple working-class, masculine tastes: the general asks how he likes his brandy, and Marlowe replies simply "in a glass."

The contrasts between the upper class and the working class are again apparent after Marlowe leaves the mansion and ventures to two bookstores. He first visits Geiger's Rare Book Store, masquerading as an effeminate book collector. The masquerade is keyed by a brief conversation in the public library in the previous scene where a comely blond librarian says to Marlowe, "You don't look like a man who collects first editions," to which Marlowe wisecracks in response, "I collect blondes in bottles too." To look and act more like someone who *does* collect first editions, Marlowe wears glasses and lisps as he talks, linking styles or degrees of masculinity with class-based stereotypes (see fig. 3). The store has few volumes in sight, and the front desk is attended not by a clerk but by Agnes, a beautiful young woman in a tight-fitting dress who, Marlowe quickly ascertains, knows nothing about books, rare or otherwise. The store is, he discovers, a front for Geiger's criminal enterprise, which includes the publication and distribution of pornography, including pictures of Carmen. Geiger is a white-collar criminal

The topic sentence here accomplishes three things: it sets up what follows in the paragraph (a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the scene in Geiger's bookstore), it provides the larger narrative context (with regard to a subsequent scene in the Acme Book Store), and it takes us from one point to another later in the film.

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hiding behind the trappings of an upper-class location—a rare bookstore—and a glamorous woman.

Fig. 3. Marlowe props up his hat, dons glasses, and speaks with a lisp to masquerade as an upper-class book collector. Agnes is less successfully putting on a masquerade. She seems hardly dressed like a "shopgirl."

To learn more about Geiger, Marlowe goes across the street to the aptly named Acme Book Store. There he is met by a young "shopgirl" who is made-up, coiffed, and costumed to fit the part. She wears heavy-framed eyeglasses and far thriftier and more practical threads than Agnes: a doughty polka-dot blouse with an unflattering body-concealing bodice over it. Marlowe asks her the same questions he asked Agnes and quickly discovers that this working-class woman knows a lot about rare books even though she could never afford to buy one.

Again the first sentence sets the scene. And it is followed by specific observations about the mise-en-scène (makeup, costuming, hair, props) to support the argument.

The scene that follows is similar to the earlier scene in Vivian's bedroom in that it is composed of a series of medium two-shots and features some snappy, sexually suggestive dialogue. But here the dialogue leads somewhere; unlike Vivian, the working-class store clerk is not interested in playing games. The pace of the editing efficiently keys the sexual tension; it quickens as something romantic builds between Marlowe and the shopgirl. We get three shots in rapid succession: of the two of them looking out the window of the shop at the rain, of the shopgirl looking at Marlowe alluringly, and of Marlowe smiling knowingly. Taken together, this sequence signals a mutual desire and it also marks a compatibility and mutual

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understanding *vis à vis* social class. They are, after all, both "on the job" when they meet. And they go right back to work when they are done. (Pointedly, neither Carmen nor Vivian works.)

In one of the film's most affecting sequences, one again steeped in the politics of class conflict, Marlowe encounters Harry Jones, aka "Jonesy," a slight, little man trying to be like Marlowe. Jonesy has the requisite tough-guy banter ("I'm no kibitzer," he says to prove he has been around), private-eye trench coat, and hat slanted just so. Soon after he and Marlowe first meet, Jonesy is cornered by Lash Canino, a brutal thug working for the upper-class gangster Eddie Mars. Canino wants to know the whereabouts of Agnes, the clerk from Geiger's bookstore (see fig. 4). Shots of the interrogation are intercut with shots of Marlowe watching from just out of Canino's line of sight. (Just a few minutes earlier, in a similarly edited sequence, we see Jonesy watch Marlowe take a beating from some thugs also hired by Mars.) Jonesy, who is in love with Agnes, finally gives up an address and is then murdered. Jonesy's death prompts Marlowe's later remark that Mars "kills by remote control," that as an upper-class criminal he hires others to do his dirty work.

This topic sentence takes us from a discussion of the scene in the Acme Book Store to a much later scene involving the interrogation of Jonesy. It also ties this scene directly to the topic at hand: class difference.

Fig. 4. Marlowe sympathizes with Jonesy, not because he is heroic but because he takes the street position; even under duress Jonesy does not betray Agnes.

Canino leaves and Marlowe enters the room just in time to watch Jonesy fall victim to the poison. Marlowe makes a quick phone call and discovers that Jonesy has

Some plot summary is necessary here to give context to Marlowe's remark.

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given Canino the wrong address. Sitting beside the dead body, Marlowe mutters to himself, "You did all right, Jonesy." This is not simply a matter of one man appreciating another's bravery. Instead, it is locked into Marlowe's class-based worldview, where honor and loyalty are prized. Marlowe also appreciates that Jonesy is the real "Doghouse Reilly," no match for the wealthy and nasty criminals who do him in. When Marlowe finally implicates Mars in a number of crimes and orchestrates his death, it is in large part in revenge for the Mars-ordered hit on Jonesy, a parsing out of class-based justice for working-class underdogs everywhere in a world mostly rigged against them.

Well before Marlowe witnesses Jonesy's death, Geiger, the man the General had hired Marlowe to "deal with," has been killed. Yet Marlowe stays on the case, absent a client, absent a financial interest in the story's outcome. When he is asked why he will not "let it all go," Marlowe replies, "Because so many people told me to stop." Persistence is a valuable attribute for the working-class detective, and it is hardly surprising that the upper-class characters find such a quality difficult to understand.

This paragraph introduces the first of two possible answers to a single narrative question: why does Marlowe stay "on the case" long after Geiger is killed? This first interpretation is fully consistent with the paper's thesis.

An alternative class-based explanation for Marlowe's persistence is provided by the film scholar Michael Walker in his essay "*The Big Sleep:* Howard Hawks and Film Noir." Walker offers a psychological reading of the narrative that focuses on Marlowe's apparent fascination with the lives of the rich and powerful. Walker contends that Marlowe is obsessed with trying to understand the psychologies of criminality and power which, for him, are both inextricably tied to wealth and privilege (191, 196, 197, 198, 202).

This second interpretation is based on an argument made in an outside source that is nonetheless clearly relevant to (and puts a new spin on) the paper's thesis about class difference and conflict.

Though this second reference to an outside source does not include a verbatim quotation, it nonetheless merits clear contextualization in the paper and appropriate citation (here again following the MLA style).

Marlowe's persistence with the case leads him back to Geiger's house where he finally outwits Eddie Mars and tricks Mars's men into killing their boss. Having solved the crimes, he tells the police that Mars was behind the murder of Sean (Rusty) Reagan, a character who preceded Marlowe as the General's working-class confidante.

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This closure reveals a significant compromise on Marlowe's part. Throughout the narrative, he has been on a quest for truth, but here at the end he lies.

Perhaps he does so to protect his clients—the sympathetic General and the damaged Carmen, whom Vivian agrees to send away for treatment. Another possible reading is that Marlowe cannot help but be tainted by the upper-class characters he has worked for and against. No closure to a story plotted by such duplicitous characters is possible without fabrication and compromise.

A final plausible explanation for this denouement can be found in the film's fundamental departure from its source, Raymond Chandler's novel. The book ends with Marlowe ruminating over the darkly comic adventures of the upper class, adventures he has only narrowly escaped alive. The novel is decidedly cynical and misogynist. Mars is not brought to justice. And Marlowe does not "get the girl" but instead Carmen takes a shot at him with a gun loaded with blanks. All of the principal women in the novel—Vivian, Carmen, and Agnes—survive more or less unscathed and unapologetic. Two of the working-class men who come in contact with them—Reagan and Jonesy—have at the end entered "the big sleep" of death.

The film ends quite differently, with Mars dead and Marlowe and Vivian in what appears to be the prelude to a kiss. This very "Hollywood" closure gestures to the market necessities of popular moviemaking. The novel's cynicism and misogyny is eschewed in favor of romance in which two movie stars, Bogart and Lauren Bacall (who plays Vivian), themselves a well-known couple, transcend their class differences in the film and seem suddenly and strangely in love. This ending may well be what the 1940s audience wanted, but it imposes a false class reconciliation to a story that had otherwise insisted upon a world characterized by class differences and struggle.

If a scene is complex and invites more than one reading, it can be a useful strategy to discuss each of the plausible interpretations. This paragraph introduces two readings that build on observations made about elements of form and style in the scenes. The interpretive claims made in both readings are consistent with the larger argument laid out in the paper.

This third possible reading is not built on content but on context: here, the relationship between the film and its source, Chandler's novel.

This last, concluding paragraph further explains the third reading (above) in an additional context, one regarding "the market necessities of popular moviemaking." Though this introduces a new and potentially rich subject for further inquiry it is also consistent with the paper's thesis and suitably takes us to the final image of the film, the prelude to a kiss. This fulfills the paper's overarching structure: chronology.

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